

Last week, more than 70 days after President Obama sent our military to attack Libya without a congressional declaration of war, the House of Representatives finally voted on two resolutions attempting to rein in the president. This debate was long overdue, as polls show Americans increasingly are frustrated by congressional inaction. According to a CNN poll last week, 55 percent of the American people believe that Congress, not the president, should have the final authority to decide whether the U.S. should continue its military mission in Libya. Yet for more than 70 days Congress has ignored its constitutional obligations and allowed the president to usurp its authority.

Finally, Congressman Dennis Kucinich was able to bring to the floor a resolution asserting that proper constitutional war power authority resides with Congress. His resolution simply stated that "Congress directs the President to remove the United States Armed Forces from Libya by not later than the date that is 15 days after the date of the adoption of this concurrent resolution."

Opponents of the withdrawal resolution said the 15 day deadline was too abrupt. But as I pointed out during debate, the president attacked Libya abruptly – he didn't even bother to consult Congress – so why can't he order an end to military action just as abruptly? When members of Congress took an oath of office to defend the Constitution, we did not pledge to defend it only gradually, a little bit at a time. On the contrary, we must defend it vigorously and completely from the moment we take that oath. I was pleased that 87 Republicans were able to put the Constitution first and support this resolution.

House Speaker John Boehner offered his own resolution on the same day, which declared that Congress would not support the insertion of US ground troops into Libya. Although this unfortunately was far from adequate to satisfy our constitutional obligations, it certainly was a step in the right direction and I am pleased that it passed in the House. Just days before Speaker Boehner's resolution, an amendment to the defense authorization act prohibited the president from using any funds in the bill to insert US troops into Libya. A separate amendment last week prohibiting any funds appropriated to the Department of Homeland Security from being used to attack Libya came within just a handful of votes from passing. All of these votes demonstrate that members of Congress increasingly understand that our foreign wars are deeply unpopular with their constituents. We are broke, and the American people know it. They expect Congress to focus on fixing America's economic problems, rather than rubber stamping yet another open-ended military intervention in Libya.

I believe these resolutions and amendments indicate that the tide is turning in the right direction. I am confident we will see Congress move toward ending our unconstitutional wars. The American people are demanding no less. The president's attack on Libya was unconstitutional and thus unlawful. This policy must be reversed.